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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Housekeepers' Chat Tuesday, November 6, 1928

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Modern Kitchen Equipment." Program includes new recipe for Election Cake. Approved by Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Bulletin available: "Convenient Kitchens."

--ooOoo--

At last, I have found her. A friend who has really taken my advice, and admits she has profited thereby. Arabella is the friend. Arabella-- who used to say she'd take advice from nobody. She told me once that a person whose only business was to "give advice," actually gave her a pain. You can imagine how I felt, after a remark like that.

It was her old-fashioned, inconvenient kitchen, that I gave Arabella advice about. If she hadn't asked my advice, I wouldn't have said what I did. Arabella asked me how she could do her housework, without wearing herself out. Every night, she said, as soon as the dishes were done, she was ready to go to bed -- too tired to read, or talk, or entertain the callers who dropped in.

I talked like a Dutch uncle to Arabella. I told her that any woman who worked day in and day out, in a kitchen so awkwardly arranged as hers, would be "dog" tired of her housekeeping job by the end of the day. Her kitchen was so poorly arranged that she must have traveled miles, in getting three meals a day. Her regular route was from the stove, to the table, to the sink, to the cabinet, to the back porch, and back again, with a few detours down cellar after potatoes, and so forth.

I told Arabella that her first duty was to arrange her stove, table, and sink, so that she wouldn't need to take such a long trip, every time she prepared a meal, and washed the dishes. Next, she should have her working surfaces raised, because the sink and the table were both too low for her. Her kitchen was poorly lighted; I suggested that she hang another light over the sink. I also suggested that she get a high stool, and save her strength by sitting down to some of her kitchen work.

I wanted to give her even more advice -- tell her to throw away some of of the worn-out crude kitchen equipment she was using, but I decided I'd better go slowly, and see how she took the advice I gave her.

I hadn't seen Arabella for almost a year, till yesterday, when she called me up, and asked me to come over. I went.

"Come on in," said Arabella, cherfully, wiping a smudge of flour from her chin, "come in, Aunt Sammy, and see what wonders I've performed. You may sit in the easy chair, because of your advanced years, while I sit on my kitchen stool, and mix up a cake."

While she worked, Arabella told me what she'd done, to make kitchen life more enjoyable.

"Your talk must have made me 'kitchen-conscious,'" she said. "After I'd made all the big improvements you suggested, I began replacing the broken-down tools I'd been using for these many years. I bought a long-handled dustpan, to save my back, and a dish drainer, to save time. Then I bought a long-handled mop; a garbage can with a tight cover; and a small garbage drainer for the corner of the sink, so I wouldn't have to open the garbage can every few minutes.

"I made a survey of my kitchen equipment, too, and replaced a few of the old heirlooms I began housekeeping with. Into the ash can went the rolling pin without handles, the egg-beater with a broken knob, and the sauce pan that leaked. Aren't you surprised, Aunt Sammy?"

"Overwhelmed," I said, and I meant it.

"Just wait," said Arabella, "you haven't heard anything yet. Remember the old egg-beater -- the one you made fun of? It had a miserable little metal handle, with a knob about the size of a small peanut, and every once in a while the cogs would slip, and I'd say things no lady should even think. My new egg-beater has a comfortable wooden handle with a knob which fits my hand. The cogs are well-protected, too, so that they can't catch in the dish towel.

"The next thing I bought was a frying basket, for deep-fat frying. It has a wooden handle, instead of the usual wire bail which gets so hot. I bought a food-chopper, too, one with an adjustable knife-head, which can be set with a lever to cut coarse, medium, fine, or very fine.

"And my knives -- you ought to see the assortment: butcher knife, bread knife, and paring knives -- all with comfortable handles, and blades of stainless steel, which is not affected by acids.

"See my flour sifter? It sifts flour eight times, in two operations -- like this. And look at my cake pan, round corners, instead of the old kind with seams in it. Lots easier to clean. What else do I have, to show you? My kitchen shears, and a wire brush for cleaning pots and pans.

"And my measuring tools, I'm not a genius, when it comes to cooking, and I need to measure things carefully. So I bought a quart measure and two measuring cups -- one for measuring dry things, like flour, and another, of heat-proof glass, for measuring liquids. You'll notice that my glass measuring cup has the cup measure marked a quarter of an inch below the top; I can measure a whole cup, without spilling. Then I have measuring spoons, ranging in size from one-quarter teaspoon to one tablespoon.

"Thermometers next. Two thermometers, Aunt Sammy, can you beat that? One for use in the oven -- that's a great help in baking; and one for use in roasting meats.

"And now," concluded Arabella, as she poured her cake batter into a pan, "now my cake is mixed, and it will be ready to bake within three or four hours. Shall we repair to the living room, Aunt Sammy?"

"Not yet," I said. "What kind of a cake are you making, that has to stand for three or fours, Arabella?"

"What kind of a cake!" repeated Arabella. "Do you mean to tell me, Aunt Sammy, that you do not recognize an Election Cake, when you see the batter? Of all things! Why, I thought you knew all about cakes, and improving kitchens, and--"

There was a wicked gleam in Arabella's eyes. I knew she was thinking of the advice I gave her, about making over her kitchen. But then -- she was willing to take my advice. And I was more than willing to take her recipe, after I'd tasted the cake.

Did you ever make an Election Cake, with brown sugar and sour milk, and fruit and spices, and a yeast cake? Then you know it's good. I'm prepared to give you Arabella's recipe this morning. It contains 14 ingredients. Don't forget, when you write this recipe, to use a small c for c, a small t for teaspoon, and a large T for tablespoon. Here we go -- 14 ingredients, for Election Cake:

1/2 cup butter
1 egg
1 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup sour milk
2/3 cup seeded raisins, cut in small pieces
2/3 cup chopped figs or dates
2-3/4 cups flour
1/2 teaspoon soda
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon cloves
1/4 teaspoon mace
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1 teaspoon salt, and
1/2 yeast cake

Fourteen ingredients: (Repeat)

Prepare a sponge by breaking the yeast into one-half cup of lukewarm water, and adding 1/8 teaspoon salt, 1/4 teaspoon sugar, and 1/2 cup flour. By the way, these quantities of salt, sugar, and flour are not included in the ingredients I gave you. Put this sponge in a warm place to lighten. In the meantime, mix the butter and sugar, and add the beaten egg and the milk. Sift together the flour, soda, spices, and salt, reserving 2 tablespoons of flour for coating the fruit. Work this flour into the fruit, until thoroughly combined. Then combine all the ingredients, including the sponge, and mix well. Pour the batter into a well-greased tube pan. Let it stand in a warm place for three or four hours. Bake for one hour, in a moderage oven (300 to 350°F.).

When I left, Arabella gave me a large portion of Election Cake, for my family. "Better have a 'Returns' party tomorrow night," suggested Arabella, "and serve Election Cake, with cider."

"See you in the White House," she added, waving goodbye from the kitchen window.

But she won't; being "Aunt Sammy" is exciting enough; I'll stay out of politics.

Tomorrow: "A Foundation Pattern for Winter Dresses."

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